

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

171315Z Nov 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 002244

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#) [ELECTIONS](#)

SUBJECT: SCENARIOS FOR 2007 ELECTION

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Thomas P. Furey for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Though potential candidates are already flinging mud and jockeying for position, there is no clear front-runner for Nigeria's 2007 presidential election. The role that President Obasanjo will play is still an important and open question. Will he be a kingmaker, eventually anointing a successor? Could he extend his current term beyond 2007? Or will Obasanjo find a legal means to run for a third term? Other potential candidates will take their cue from Obasanjo and are eagerly awaiting a signal of his intentions. Public bickering between VP Atiku and Obasanjo demonstrates their rivalry for PDP backing in 2007. Other heavyweights such as former leaders Ibrahim Babangida and Muhammadu Buhari are also active and will help shape the upcoming election season. End Summary.

-----  
There's a will . . .  
-----

2. (C) The sense amongst Nigeria's political elite is that President Obasanjo wants to remain in power beyond 2007. However, Nigeria's constitution limits the President to two terms in office. It is still an open question whether Obasanjo will step down and throw his support to another People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate or whether he will look for a means to stay in office beyond 2007.

3. (C) Obasanjo has not yet given a definitive signal that he is out of the 2007 race. He denied vehemently in public that he had "sworn on the Bible" that he would not run, as requested by his Vice President Atiku Abubakar. He has also thus far declined to throw his support to any of the other contenders for the PDP nomination, even as he promises several of them that "ultimately" they might be Obasanjo's "chosen one." Even if Obasanjo plans to step down, it is possible that he prefers to keep the party fractured for as long as possible, in order to avoid becoming a lame duck and protect his ability to hand-pick his successor. Once the PDP candidate emerges, a great deal of power and loyalty will shift to him even before the election, as members look to curry favor with a new administration.

-----  
But is there a way?  
-----

4. (C) Embassy believes that there are three potential means for Obasanjo to extend his tenure in office. He could either extend his current term by declaring a state of emergency and delaying elections, or he could run for a third term. The other option bruited is the extension of the term by two years. However, legally such an extension would only be valid for future terms according to Nigerian jurisprudence.

5. (C) The first option would be easiest to initiate \* declare a state of emergency and remain in office indefinitely, albeit in six month increments. The current constitution allows this, and there are a number of crises bubbling under the surface that could be used as a pretext for an emergency declaration (i.e. Biafra, the Delta, Bakassi, Muslim-Christian tensions, ethnic tensions, or even corruption.) The state of emergency route could backfire, however. Political elites and the military might question how an extension of Obasanjo's tenure would solve any national "emergency" if he was unable to solve the problem during his 8 years in office. The military and the political class could ask why not install another leader to restore order, perhaps a military leader?

6. (C) The "third term" option is both risky and currently illegal. Contacts report that Obasanjo has lawyers studying the constitution and looking for any loopholes that might allow him to get around its two-term limit. If this effort fails, he could also work to have the constitution amended. An amendment is a complicated procedure (as in the USA) requiring ratification by both chambers of the National Assembly and 24 of Nigeria's 36 states. Even if Obasanjo were successful in obtaining a legal green light to run for a third term, he would still have to win the election. Considering his deep unpopularity with Nigerians from all

walks of life and the current list of other candidates, his chances of winning a free and fair election are almost nil. Even winning a less than free and fair election would take tremendous support from the political coteries and the security services, support not evident at the moment. It is not certain that Obasanjo has enough support from within the system to win even a rigged election this time.

-----  
VP Atiku fighting for the nomination  
-----

17. (C) Press reports over the past several weeks have described "open warfare" between President Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar. This is exaggerated, but allegations of corruption are flying in both directions. Atiku's enemies cited the August 3 raid of his wife's home in Washington as evidence of his corruption, while Orji Kalu sent a letter to the President and then to the media alleging Obasanjo is corrupt. The President's response was to order the EFCC to "thoroughly investigate" the allegations against him. Kalu, expressing skepticism, refused to cooperate with the EFCC rightly pointing out that it has no jurisdiction over incumbent office-holders, including the head of state.

18. (C) The real question is how much of the PDP is loyal to Atiku rather than Obasanjo. Some were calling for Atiku's ouster from the PDP, but many are loyal to him, including key governors and party stalwarts. Recent events have indicated that Obasanjo, rather than dealing with the elements of the party against his third term ambitions, is engineering out all opponents. If Atiku leaves the party, a significant factor will be how much of the structure of the former People's Democratic Movement (PDM) will go with him? Founded by Obasanjo's deputy during his 1976-1979 regime, Shehu Yar'adua, the PDM remains the strongest and most cohesive political structure in Nigeria and provided the muscle that propelled Obasanjo to two terms as President. That organization is fractured now, with part of the group remaining with the Vice President, a number of the group moving to the President and several others trying to maintain the cohesiveness of a political organization with an ideology while looking for a candidate. Still, the remnants command a political structure that remains unrivaled in the political arena. Only Obasanjo, with his control of governmental organizations, can claim a structure to rival its nationwide political influence.

19. (C) The first rumblings of a new force breaking off from the PDP have already been heard. On November 7, a group of 60 politicians met in Lagos to form the Movement for the Defence of Democracy (MDD). MDD organizers include Audu Ogbah, the former National Chairman of the PDP (until he was ousted by Obasanjo in early 2005), Lawal Kaita, National Chairman of the PDM, and other heavyweights. The MDD says that its aim is to organize resistance to the "dictatorial actions of the Obasanjo administration and defend the 1999 constitution." For now the MDD is calling itself a "new political organization," but could formalize into a party in order to contest the 2007 elections. Given the makeup of the organization, this could be the first signs of the Vice President's future election vehicle.

-----  
Don't Forget The Rest of the Country  
-----

110. (C) While former Head of State Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) still makes noises about his presidential ambitions, most observers are dismissing his commitment. Historically, IBB has not taken action until he was guaranteed victory, preferring to maintain his mythological invincibility instead. According to some, Obasanjo told him specifically to stand down his campaign as "there is no vacancy." Even so, IBB will be able to create mischief and influence the outcome of the political games whether as a candidate or not.

111. (C) ANPP's 2003 Presidential Candidate Muhammadu Buhari is the other serious player in the 2007 scenario. He has stated his intent to run, but has done little to revive his political organization since the conclusion of the lawsuit against the 2003 elections. With both the President and the Vice President interfering with the ANPP's operations, it is unclear whether Buhari can, or wants to, remain with that party. He had a parallel organization in 2003 and could easily take his organization and his millions of grassroots supporters to another party.

112. (C) At the same time, minority politicians from both the South-South and the Southeast are making noises, claiming that it is their turn to rule the country. Other than corrupt governors, (and they are almost all corrupt) serious politicians with the stature to compete are few and far between. Still a political realignment could take place based on these regional aspirations that would weaken the two major national parties, the PDP and the ANPP, and strengthen regional parties and associations, giving a shot to a minority candidate.

-----  
Comment  
-----

113. (C) The scenarios leading up to the 2007 elections all hinge on one thing: Obasanjo's intention to either step down or continue. The irrelevance of his reforms to the masses leads to Obasanjo's lack of support on the street. Anger with his regime is palpable, but Nigerians are long suffering and could allow him to finish his current term. The expectation of continuation, though, changes the dynamic. As civil society searches for a way to challenge the government machinery in the face of treason charges and continuing insecurity and instability, the political situation may become tenser, with localized flare-ups increasing.

FUREY